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# The Meaning of Javanese Adolescents' Involvement in Youth Gangs During the Discoveries of Youth Identity: A Phenomenological Study

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## The Meaning of Javanese Adolescents' Involvement in Youth Gangs During the Discoveries of Youth Identity: A Phenomenological Study

### Abstract

Yogyakarta is a part of Javanese society. Javanese culture, which always enforces moral values, has a practical implication toward adolescents' views about their self-identity. Yogyakarta adolescents are well known to have positive self-identity, good behavior, and tend to become successful persons in their youth. In the past years, a phenomenon of youth gangs that often conduct irresponsible acts such as brawls, stabbing terror, and even murder has emerged. The question of the research is how adolescent members of a youth gang give meaning to their involvement in a youth gang. To answer the question, we used a phenomenological research method. We employed a modified Colaizzi method as defined by Moustakas (1994) to analyze the data. The participants of the research are adolescents with criteria as follows: coming from the Javanese family, living in Yogyakarta, a high school student, a member of a youth gang, had been involved in law violation. The research results show that Javanese adolescents, members of a youth gang, value their involvement in the gang as a means of showing their self-existence because the gang is the only place that provides wiggle room to express themselves, adolescents failed to construct values about self-existence, and also they lacked appreciation from their closest people and their environment.

### Keywords

Adolescent, Youth Gang, Self-Identity, Indonesia, Phenomenology

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# **The Meaning of Javanese Adolescents' Involvement in Youth Gangs During the Discoveries of Youth Identity: A Phenomenological Study**

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## **Background**

Adolescence is a transition period from childhood to adulthood (Hasanah et al., 2018), physically, psychologically, cognitively, and sociologically. From the perspectives of social psychology, adolescents tend to experience many processes in the changing of social relationships, hopes, roles, and responsibilities from dependency on parents into an independent state (Curtis, 2015; Steinberg, 2002). They are gradually growing a desire to try a new way of behavior (American Psychological Association, 2002), self-learning, and self-management competency (Karabanova & Poskrebysheva, 2013), while also learning to make decisions (Hoang, 2015; Poskitt, 2016), regarding themselves. All of the processes above are parts of the process of building self-identity (Marcia, 1966, 1980, 1993; Pfeifer & Berkman, 2017; Sapru, 2006). The most important part for young people in the process of finding self-identity is to be able to build a positive self-identity (Tsang et al., 2012).

"The term 'identity' refers to the definitions that are created for and superimposed on the self" (Baumeister, 1977, p. 681). It means that the self-identity of someone is a product of self-assessment, which is then portrayed as a self-image and internalized. The development of self-identity is an essential process for adolescents' prosperity (Arnold, 2017); therefore, the

process is the most crucial phase in adolescents' growth (Klimstra & van Doeselaar, 2017). In the process, it is necessary to have a proper and good knowledge capacity (Erikson, 1950, 1963), and also moral consideration (Kohlberg, 1981), so the adolescents have an objective view about values. Adolescents' views of their living environment can influence the ability of adolescents to identify themselves (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2017, 2018).

From the perspectives of social psychology, values are implanted in the cultures. Values influence the community institutions; therefore, values became an essential matter in determining an individual's behavior and social interaction (Trommsdorff, 2012). Hence, in the process of forming self-identity of adolescents, it is essential to pay attention to the context of a culture in the surrounding society. The cultural view has a practical implication to the view of adolescents in identifying their self-identities (Duriez et al., 2012).

Javanese society, Indonesia, is renowned for its high cultured society. They make social values a benchmark in appraising the behavior and self-identity of someone (Koentjaraningrat, 1985a). Thinking patterns, ways of communicating, and the perspectives of Javanese society tend to be aligned with those of an Eastern culture, which is significantly different from that which adheres to Western culture (Luo, 2008). Javanese hold the philosophy of the importance of perfection of life (Wibawa, 2013). The essence of Javanese philosophy is *ngudi kasampurnan* [seeking for perfection], physically and spiritually. To be or to get close to perfection is not an easy thing, because it is necessary to have a strong endurance in holding lust and suffering. Humans shall not complain because complaining does not solve the problems; instead, complaining complicates the problems faced (Sulaksono, 2014).

Generally, the inheritance of values in the Javanese culture and philosophies are provided by parents through a parenting style that is strong with Eastern social values (Aryanti, 2015; Wiryomartono, 2018). Javanese adolescents accept the philosophies as positive. Javanese adolescents see the future they desire as a future that can provide self-satisfaction, not only in the material necessity but also in religion, which is essential to them (Rarasati et al., 2012); therefore, they can acquire positive self-identities (Law et al., 2012).

For a long time, Yogyakarta adolescents have been known to have a positive self-identity, able to achieve good performances both in academic or non-academic fields, and they tend to be successful persons in their youth. Since early 2013, the image of Yogyakarta's adolescents has been disrupted by youth gangs that often conduct socially deviating behaviors such as brawls between gangs, stabbings, terrorism, and even murder. The behavior of this kind of youth gangs in Yogyakarta that tends to be brutal and sadistic is also known as "klithih."

The term, klithih, has been popular since the early 2000s in Yogyakarta. Klithih was meant to be an activity to look for foods and beverages in *angkringan* [tent stall selling food and beverages in Java] at night. Nowadays, the meaning of klithih refers to a behavior of a certain gang, team, or group of adolescents that often gather after school ends without any proper or definite purpose and then enacts violence (Ahnaf & Salim, 2017).

In some cases, the perpetrators of klithih appear as sadistic and cruel monsters. They were terrorizing the society in every irresponsible way, such as stabbing and murder (Arifin, 2017) to show their existence. Not all youth gangs commit klithih. However, it is confirmed in many cases that the culprits of klithih were identified as members of youth gangs who were also students. Thriving klithih cases exerted by youth gangs in Yogyakarta today is a social-environmental crisis, which makes unrest for the people of Yogyakarta.

The advent of youth gangs in Yogyakarta is improper and deviates from the norm of Javanese society. Generally, Javanese people respect each other. They are very concerned about the perception of other people toward themselves. They feel *ajrih* [*ajrih* is a Javanese word which means afraid] if their conduct would spoil their name in front of the society (Koentjaraningrat, 1985b). Therefore, the phenomenon of the thriving youth gangs in

Yogyakarta triggered a question about the factors that background adolescents to deviate and join a youth gang and how they construe their involvement in the gang.

## **Literature Review**

### **Self-Identity**

Self-identity is not a tangible matter: self-identity cannot be seen, touched, tasted, or smelled. However, today, there are many claims that its presence is so clear that almost every aspect is being related to the matter of self-identity (Malešević, 2006, p. 13). Identity is a quality, belief, character, expression that represents someone (self-identity) or a group (social category or social group; James, 2015, p. 174). The forming process of self-identity implicates skills, beliefs, and childhood identification into a unique unit that is more or less coherent to the development of someone into a young adult. There is a sense of continuity toward the past and the future in it (Marcia et al., 1993, p. 3).

The term of self-identity was first introduced by Erikson (1950, 1963). He described the process of forming self-identity as a process to identify oneself with a sense of new similarity and continuity to certain exact roles. Erikson adopted a psychosocial approach to comprehend the identity by visualizing an interaction between the biological, the psychological, and the social in a historical context. He emphasized these elements equally and enforced the importance of historical context for their definitions (Kroger, 2007).

This self-identity concept of Erikson was developed by Marcia (1966), becoming ego-identity theory. Marcia succeeded in determining four sorts of development states of self-identity based on commitment and exploration: diffusion-identity (someone who is still confused about their self-identity and yet to do self-exploration), foreclosure (someone who has not yet done self-exploration but has already determined their self-identity by virtue of parents' direction), moratorium (someone who has not yet established their self-identity but has already been doing self-exploration), and achievement (someone who has succeeded in establishing and determining their self-identity through self-exploration).

### **The Connection Between Self-Identity and Adolescents' Involvement in a Gang**

Leverso and Matsueda (2019) developed a theory of enduring gang membership based on gang organization and gang identity. The theory was tested with a multivariate model of longitudinal data from the Denver Youth Survey. The research results showed that the theoretical framework based on gang identity and gang organization can be used to understand the background of someone in maintaining their gang membership. Both gang organization and gang identity partially can influence how long a member of a gang spends their time in the gang. The research has provided a clearer picture of an individual's behavior showing that their involvement in a gang is influenced by the gang organization and gang identity. However, the research did not take the cultural values in the environment of the individual into consideration to identify the individual's decision in the process of identifying themselves with the gang organization and the gang identity. From a survey by Alleyne and Wood (2010) given to 798 middle school students from London School, the participants were identified as follows: 59 gang members youth, 75 peripheral youth, and 664 non-gang youth. From the study, it was identified that each group of participants had significant differences in the understanding of violations of social norms limit. Besides that, the level of the ferociousness of each group on the violation is significantly different. That matter shows that examining each individual's differences is essential in the process of cognitive development related to their involvement in a gang,

The literature review by Wood (2014) shows that a gang organization has a strong role in internalizing the gang's social rules into its members. The rules make members more submissive to gang's rules than social norms in society. This matter is a process of an individual's self-identification into the gang. It can strengthen their resolve in attaining the gang's organizational goals. A member of a gang who has identified themselves in to a gang is more adventurous in committing moral violations. They also build justifications toward deviances. In this context, Wood suggested a closer approach in conducting research to groups of gangs to obtain more accurate data of gang intervention to prevent more potential members and reduce the existing members.

The analysis results of Lauger (2020) delivers a conclusion that self-identity theory can predict that the gang's organizational goals often background a gang member's behavior in showing their identity or roles in a brutal action. However, sometimes, the violent deeds conducted by gang members take place spontaneously, when gang members do not intend to conduct any violence. The idea shows that even if theoretically the identity of a gang member is focused on becoming a unit of a gang, a big portion of gang members possibly have their own various identities.

Based on some research (Alleyne & Wood, 2010; Lauger, 2020; Leverso & Matsueda, 2019; Wood, 2014), the involvement of adolescents in a gang is a way to obtain self-acknowledgment as a process of self-identity development. However, in general, the research about youth gangs tends to highlight the collective behavior of gangs and the relationship with the other communities (White, 2013). The private experiences of gang members as a part of a gang are often neglected because most research on gangs emphasize the gang's identity as that of an adolescents' life support. On the other hand, every person has their view of values about their life. Therefore, every life phenomenon may deliver a different meaning for every person (Devoe, 2012; Frankl, 1959). Besides that, there is a significant matter that needs to be understood, that is, considering an environmental cultural context as a background of someone (Lauger, 2020; Wren, 2002) is essential in examining the differences of individuals related to their involvement in a gang. Thus, we are in line with the statement of Wood and Alleyne (2010) that individual psychological processes that support their membership in gangs still needs to be explored more broadly. This article tries to explore the meaning of the experience of students who are members of youth gangs in their involvement in youth gang activities in the process of forming their self-identity in the context of Javanese culture.

### **Research Questions**

What is the meaning of the experiences of adolescents about their involvement in youth gangs during the process of discoveries of their self-identity?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore the meaning of adolescents' experiences in their involvement in youth gangs during the process of discoveries of their self-identity.

### **Role of the Researchers**

We are directly involved in the world of education of youth in Yogyakarta because we are researchers and lecturers at universities in Yogyakarta. Besides, we are also members of the community of Yogyakarta society who felt concerned about the massive rampant of klithih in Yogyakarta that has created unrest for the people of Yogyakarta, especially the loss of people's sense of security when going out at night. We, as researchers and educators, felt the

need to find solutions to the problems being faced by the community through this research. Our hope as researchers is that we can find a source of impetus for the involvement of adolescents in youth gang activities so that in the future, we and others can figure out prevention measures and solutions to counteract this problem.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Design Overview**

We conducted the research from a constructivist paradigm with a view that a researcher cannot reach an absolute single reality (Adom et al., 2016). Therefore, the understanding of something depends on the subjective interpretation that has been built based on humans' experiences in the historical and cultural boundaries (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The approach used in the research is the phenomenological qualitative approach (Langdridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) that is based on the idea that the direct performer or the subject of a phenomenon is the most knowledgeable person about the essence of the phenomenon. The view is in line with the research question that endeavors to excavate the meaning built by the adolescents' experiences in their mind about their involvement in a youth gang.

Based on the review of the writing of Langdridge (2007) and Moustakas (1994), we concluded that the hermeneutic phenomenological research method was the most suitable in conducting the research because the objective of the research was to interpret the participants' words and their involvement in youth gangs. In this context, the participants stood as subjects of the phenomenon and deemed to be the only parties who would know the truth of the phenomenon. We analyzed all information conveyed by the participants according to Howard's (1991) idea that every bit of information gathered from the participants automatically becomes a unit of analysis.

Phenomenological hermeneutics, as a philosophy movement, came from Martin Heidegger and was developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (Guignon, 2000; Irwin, 2003). The hermeneutic approach started from an idea that humans' experiences are souled with an essence, obtained from one's socio-historical context, and built based on their experiences. Through the hermeneutic approach, we try to identify the participants' experiences and explore the relationship between the words and the intentions of the person who experienced the phenomenon (Tomkins & Eatough, 2018). The notions above correspond with our philosophy as researchers that correspond with the constructivism paradigm (Adom et al., 2016); we believe that every person is a being who has their own natural desire and will act in accordance with their values, which are constructed by the individual's free will; thus, every individual is responsible for their own knowledge and understanding about their life.

### **Research Setting**

The researchers conducted the study in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* [The Yogyakarta Sultanate] was found by Prince Mangkubumi also known as Hamengkubuwono I, in 1775, as a result of the Treaty of Giyanti. Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat has grown into a city, rich in Javanese culture and arts, which then was called Yogyakarta. The center of arts and culture development in Yogyakarta is the sultanate. Various Javanese classics such as dance, song, poetry, literature, musical instrument, painting, and sculpture grew in the *Keraton* [palace], which then became the people's art (Ditjen Cipta Karya, n.d).

One of the riches of Yogyakarta is education. There were two essential embryos of Indonesian education in Yogyakarta, namely, Muhammadiyah (Harianto, 2017) and Taman Siswa (Dewantara, 1977). Taman Siswa was an educational institution based on nationalism

and culture; Muhammadiyah is a religious-based educational institution. Nowadays, Yogyakarta is also called as the city of culture and the city of the student in Indonesia.

The people of Yogyakarta are heterogeneous, multicultural, and most highly educated. However, the lifestyle of Yogyakarta society generally adheres to the Javanese culture lifestyle. For the people of Yogyakarta, the view of society and social acknowledgment are essential to maintain their self-esteem as Javanese humans. That behavior also exists in the parenting style of the family toward their children, including adolescents. Family regulation and the norm of society in Javanese culture are dominant factors in the development of children's character and self-identity. Geertz (1961) stated that the Javanese parenting style emphasizes the instilment of *adji* [respect] and *isin* [shame].

## Participants

According to Padilla-Diaz (2015), generally, participants in phenomenological research are chosen according to what is known as purposive sampling, namely, to apply some specific criteria for research participants. The criteria for inclusion in this study were a high school student who had been dealing with the police for violence cases and lives in Yogyakarta. To determine the number of participants, the researchers referred to the saying of Starks and Trinidad (2007) that in qualitative research, a person can provide plenty of data. The number of participants in this study is limited to 3 participants. We referred to Langdrige (2007) that in a phenomenological study, the number of participants is enough within 3-10 participants (Langdrige, 2007).

The process of determining the research participants was carefully done as it is not easy to approach teenagers who got involved in the group of klithih-youth gangs. The data from schools that have students who engaged in youth gang activity are obtained from the local network and news in Yogyakarta. After carrying the school list, the researchers visited one of the headmasters of the schools. We communicated the purpose and process of the research, which would be conducted. We also asked for the permit from the school for the research, while also showing a letter of research recommendation from the researchers' university.

After getting the research permit from the school of the participant candidates, we asked the school for the names of students who had been involved in brawls and violent incidents using sharp weapons, until the point of getting involved with the police. The information about the names of students who were met the criteria came from the Guidance and Consultation (GC) teacher. After successfully acquiring some names, the headmaster gave us an opportunity to meet with the participants one by one. The meetings were conducted in the GC teacher room at the school. On that occasion, we introduced who we were and conveyed the research objective. We also handed out a written statement to the participant candidates that the research is purposed only for academics. From the five names given by the school, only three persons were willing to be participants in the research, with a note that the name and identity of the participants are kept confidential. Although the participants were older than 17 years old, the participants had received permission from their parents. To secure the privacy of the participants (American Psychological Association, 2017), the researchers substituted the identity of the participants into codes: P1, P2, and P3.

## Data Collection

In phenomenological research, the views and experiences of participants are the sources of data; therefore, the data collection involved in-depth interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994). In conducting the interviews, we exerted structural and descriptive questions and also used a new imaginative variation to explore the experiences of the participants (Bevan, 2014). For the



interviews, we designed an interview guide as a tool to keep the interviews organized. We arranged the interview guide according to the general question and the research objective. In the interview guide, we only attached primary questions. We developed further in-depth questions as the research progressed and in the context of the conversation. The five primary questions are as follows:

1. Please tell us about your associations in and outside of the school. Is it true that you are in an unusual group or community? Such as youth-gang?
2. Could you please tell us how did you get into the gang? Could you tell us more about that matter?
3. After joining the gang, what changed in your life? What do you often do with your friends in the community? What do you feel about that? Could you tell us more about your experiences regarding that?
4. How do you feel when joining those activities with your community? Why did you do that? Please tell us more about that.
5. Do your parents know about you joining a gang? How do they respond to it? Tell us more about that matter.

All interviews were recorded using an electronic device. In the process of data collection, the researchers also created a field note journal (Creswell, 2013), as a way to maintain the focus of the entire research process (Hellesø et al., 2015). We created a daily journal to note every research step. Besides that, we also wrote every research context obtained from the observation, such as the body language of the participants when conveying their experiences. The only data that we analyzed in this research were the explicit statements of the participants. However, we kept paying attention to the field note to maintain objectivity also to avoid any refraction and researchers' reactions toward the field experiences (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

We interviewed each participant individually for 45-60 minutes. One of the researchers interviewed the participants while the other recorded the interview and created a field note. We contacted each participant three times (Seidman, 2006). For the first contact, the researchers proposed being a participant in the research. When asking them to be a participant, the researchers explained the detail of the research, namely, the process and the objectives of the research. In that meeting, the researchers also obtained the agreement from participants and permission from their parents on paper. The second meeting was the process of the interview, which took place at the participant's preferred location. The third meeting was the last interview, conducted after the researchers found the themes for the research. In this third meeting, the researchers explained the entire research results to get the responses and feedback from the participants about the research. At the meeting, the participants read and listened to the general picture of the research results. They agreed and felt satisfied with the results. Therefore, there was no change in the research results. The last meeting was conducted as a way to ensure the credibility and validity of the research (Anderson, 2010).

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in the research refers to the steps of the Colaizzi method as defined by Moustakas (1994), which consists of the procedures of epoché, identifying the meaning and the general essence, horizontalization, and textual and structural analysis. Generally, the analysis process can be seen in Figure 1 below.

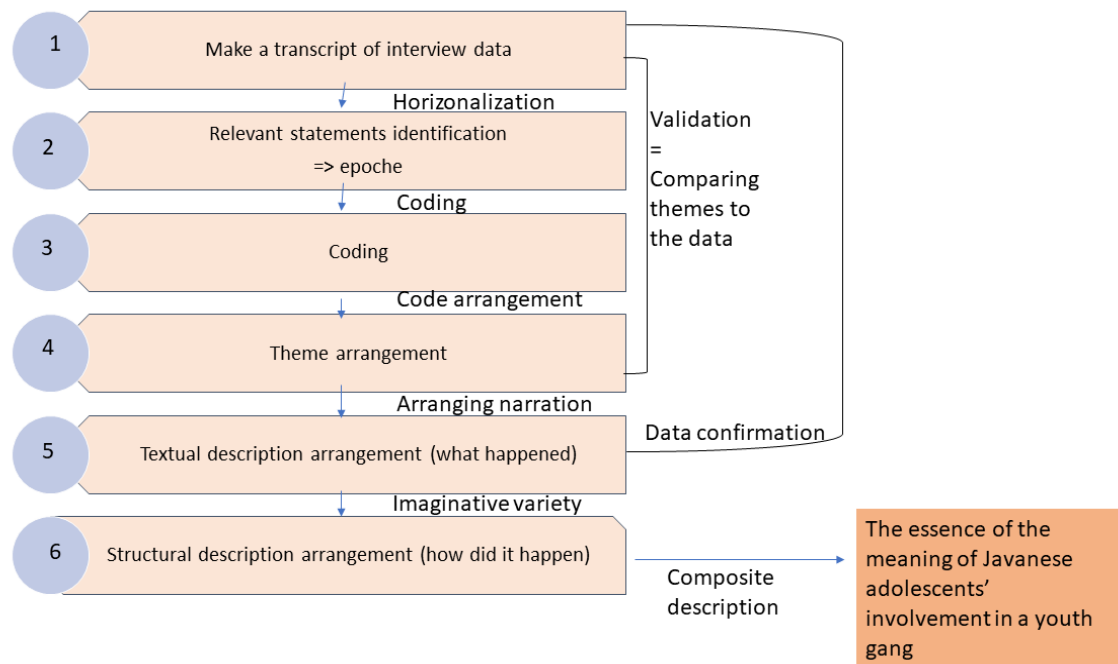


Figure 1 Data Analysis Process

In detail, the data analysis process can be explained as follows:

1. We made a transcript of data based on the recording of the in-depth interviews and reinspected the journal/log book and the field notes to obtain a more real research context. Our journal and field notes were our ways to ensure the accuracy of the data.
2. Next, we identified all statements relevant to the research topics. In this process, we paid attention to the participants' statements, which explicitly showed the essence of participants' experiences about their involvement in a youth gang, word by word. This process is called *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). We exerted the research questions as the primary guidance in examining the relevance of participants' statements. The statements that we identified to be relevant were the statements that explicitly told about (a) the primary reasons participants joined a gang; (b) participants' activities after becoming a gang member; (c) their feelings and responses when joining in gang activities; and (d) their objective view about themselves, family, and the environments. In this context, we identified the most relevant statements with the research objective and analyzed why the participants responded that way. The identification process needed to be followed with strong empathy from the researcher and the notion that every statement of the participants is equal (*epoche*) (Moustakas, 1994). Below is the example of horizontalization in this research:

Researcher: What did you do?  
 Participant: I only thought to chase them. Hmm...at that time, one of the guys got into someone's residence, since we couldn't find that guy we pelted the house with rocks and pebbles.  
 R: What was in your mind?  
 P: I thought I should **take revenge**  
 R: Didn't you feel any uneasiness or frightened of the consequences of your deeds?  
 P: Hmm...We didn't.... **We didn't consider it ma'am... What in our mind was only to beat that rascal. When we are together with the gang, we are easily committing any deed even it violates the law. At that time, we didn't consider what we would responsible with. What was essential was our pride as a gang should be protected.**

Figure 2. Horizontalization

All relevant statements of the participants from the transcript [highlighted in yellow, as figured in Figure 2] were noted in a bracketing note (Chan et al., 2013), then we put the note into a file. In creating the bracketing note, we started with eliminating every judgment and prejudice toward the participants. This refers to Plous's (2003) idea that prejudice should be eliminated in researchers' minds because prejudice not only relates to a belief but also covers other feelings such as hate, disgust, and dislike. Therefore, we thought to be open-minded in examining every participants' statement. In this process, every statement of the participants was deemed to have a similar value (*epoché*) (Moustakas, 1994).

3. After acquiring the relevant statements of all participants, we enacted coding. The coding used in this analysis is the *line-by-line coding*. The coding was used to mark parts of the participants' statements that possess particular meaning. The marked statements were identified to find the code of the topic. The use of line-by-line coding immersed us in the perspectives of the participants in analyzing the data critically and analytically (Charmaz, 2006). An example of the process of *line by line coding* is as follows:

Relevant Statements	Topic Codes
We didn't consider it ma'am... What in our mind was only to beat that rascal. <b>When we are together</b> with the gang, we <b>are easily committing any deed even it violates the law</b> . At that time, we didn't consider what we would be responsible for. What was essential was <b>our pride as a gang should be protected</b> (P1, baris 64-65)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easily conduct deed when together with the gang</li> <li>- Becomes more audacious when gathering together,</li> </ul>

Figure 2 The example of coding as a process of finding the topics

4. We joined the coded statements that had similar meanings or values of the participants to arrange them into themes. In a phenomenological study, theme identification, grouping, and every coding or categorization usually are qualified as preparations because they function to put the data in order before further structural analysis. The themes in the thematic portrayal are the core of the answers of the participants. The term "theme," used in the research, refers to "features of a system that may be focused on separately,

but that requires consideration of other features of a system for their definition and for an understanding of their functioning" (Airman & Rogoff, 1987, p. 37). In the process of constructing the themes, we interpreted every statement of the participants with the belief that the researchers need to listen to the various voice of the participants in order to understand the essence of their experiences (Gilligan et al., 2003). In this context, the researchers rechecked every formulated meaning with the original statements to maintain its description consistency.

An example of creating a theme is as follows:

Relevant Statements	Topic Codes	Theme
We didn't consider it ma'am... What in our mind was only to beat that rascal. <b>When we are together</b> with the gang, we are easily committing any deed even it violates the law. At that time, we didn't consider what we would be responsible for. What was essential was <b>our pride as a gang should be protected</b> (P1, lines 64-65)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easily conduct deed when together with the gang</li> <li>- Becomes more audacious when gathering together,</li> </ul>	<b>Easily provoked when gathering together</b>
At that time, I didn't Ma'am... [Did not consider what consequence they would be responsible with] what I thought was I must chase the rascal. <b>When we are together</b> like that, it is easy to get emotional, <b>don't care about anything else</b> . When it's over, especially when it comes to the police and involving the parents, there is also a sense of regret. Actually, my friends and I know that brawls are breaking the laws, but what else we can do (P2, lines 60-63).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easily get when emotional when gathering with the gang</li> <li>- Being ignorant</li> </ul>	<b>Easily provoked when gathering together</b>
Ahhh... <b>At that time, we only thought of attacking that person</b> . We were encouraged by each other, well, <b>we were easily</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When together with the gang, easily provoked</li> </ul>	<b>Easily provoked when gathering together</b>

provoked to commit that deed (P3, lines 78-79)	- Encouraged to attack the "opponent."	
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Figure 3 Creating a theme

5. The next step was arranging the Individual Textural Description (ITD). In this step, we used the data from the transcribed in-depth interview recording, which had been through the process of coding and themes. To arrange an ITD, we started by arranging the meaning of each participant's experiences. In this step, we followed the recommendation of Moustakas (1994) that researchers pay attention to every individual's statements or words of each participant to find the unique perception about the phenomenon being studied. Below is the example of the arrangement of Individual Textural Description:

Relevant Statements	Topic Codes	Theme	Formulated meaning: Individual Textural Descriptions (ITD)
We didn't consider it ma'am... What in our mind was only to beat that rascal. When we are together with the gang, we are easily committing any deed even it violates the law. At that time, we didn't consider what we would be responsible for. What was essential was our pride as a gang should be protected (P1, lines 64-65)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easily conduct deed when together with the gang</li> <li>- Becomes more audacious when gathering together,</li> </ul>	<b>Easily provoked when gathering together</b>	Based on the in-depth individual interviews about the activities of the participants in a gang, the fact that the deviances committed by a member of a gang sometimes happened spontaneously. For example, they committed violence when someone disturbed their gang. The example can be seen in the statements: P1 lines 64-65; P2 lines 60-63; and P3 lines 78-79.

Figure 4 Individual textural description arrangement

After successfully constructed the Individual Textural Description (ITD) for each participant, then we created a Composite Textural Description (CTD) from all themes created.

6. After creating the CTD, we created an Individual Structural Description (ISD) from the experiences of each participant. An ISD is an image of the description of the "hidden" experiences that recognized by the researchers. The structural description simply depicts the "how" of a phenomenon to explain the "what" of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135). Below is the process of the arrangement of ISD of each ITD:

<b>Formulated meaning: Individual Textural Descriptions (ITD)</b>	<b>Individual Structural Description (ISD)</b>
Based on the results of the individual in-depth interviews about the participants' activities after joining the gang, they explained that the deviances that often committed by them are gang brawls on the basis of feeling annoyed. The example can be seen in the statement of P1 lines 64-65	The participant stated that when they are together with their gang, it is so easy to commit violence without any consideration. The deviances often committed by the participants usually spontaneously happened because they felt offended by the other party, and the party scratched the gang's pride. The audaciousness of gang members to commit deviances tends to rise when they are together with their gang. They feel strong, courageous, and easily provoked.

*Figure 5 The process of Individual Structural Description arrangement*

After that, we arranged the Composite Textural Description (CTD) to explain how the phenomenon occurred for each theme created (Moustakas, 1994).

7. For the last, we combined the CTD and CSD into a Composite Textural-Structural Description (CTSD), to build the synthesis meaning and the essence of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181). The meaning of the participants' experiences expressed in the CTD and CSD were combined and analyzed repeatedly to obtain the essence of the experiences. In this process, we reread and reidentified all themes and transcripts, along with paying attention to the Javanese cultural context as the participants' live background. The cultural context is necessary for the process to obtain the whole meaning of a group. The results of the combination are presented in the discussion section to make it easier to show how family, culture, and society can influence adolescents' ability in the process of self-identity development.

### **Building Trustworthiness**

To ensure the credibility and validity of the research results, we refer to the guidance of Brantlinger et al. (2005) to note every step of the research process in detail. Besides that, the researchers also confirmed the entire research results to the participants before publishing it to avoid misperception and interpretation of the data.

### **Findings**

This section consists of the presentation of our research findings. In presenting the research finding, we present the research results continuously and comprehensively to make the phenomenon easier to be objectively understood. In the first section, we present the themes of the research results, to provide a whole picture of the essence of participants' experiences. Next, we provide the Composite Textural Description (CTD) to explain what happened and what the participants did in the phenomenon. After that, we provide the Composite Structural Description (CSD) to reveal the connection between participants' words and actions in the

phenomenon. In the last presentation, we provide a Composite Textural-Structural Description (CTSD), which is a combination of the CSD and the CTD. CTSD constructed to understand the essence of the participants' experiences about their involvement in a youth gang.

## Research Results Themes

Through the data processing of the interviews, the researchers have found five themes about the meaning of self-identity to Javanese adolescents, members of a youth gang, as follows: (a) I want to be recognized, (b) The result of struggling is much more appreciated, (c) Members solidarity, (d) Easily provoked when gathering together, (e) Feeling of dilemma.

### *Theme 1: I want to be recognized.*

The beginning of respondents to be a member of a gang was initiated by curiosity. In addition, they also felt the need for something, namely, existences. There were also those who stated that they are involved in a youth gang because they wanted to have like-minded friends. Some of the participants expressed this as follows.

P1 stated:

In the beginning, I was just invited by a friend. And then ya [Indonesians tend to follow their sentences with ya which can be mean yes or well]...*melu aelah* [*melu aelah* is a Javanese language. Melu means follow/join, ae means just. Melu aelah can be interpreted as just join lah] because of curiosity what would it be like, to be a member of the gang. I thought it was interesting so that I could be swanky and exist haha. (P1, lines 6-10)

P2 stated a similar thing with P1:

At first, I just got invited. I was approached by some of the active members of the gang. I saw that they were solid, and feared by the others at the school. I got attracted to have the same power in the circle. (P2, lines 6-8)

P3 explained that they just wanted to have a try: "Ya..then I joined the gang because I just wanted to have a try because young people are influenced easily, something like that" (P3, lines 7-8). P3 has experience not far different from P1 and P2. P3 explained that their involvement in youth gang activities was encouraged by their desire to get many friends and wanted to be recognized:

Usually, I was just ignored by my friends. Maybe I was not that rich nor smart. In the early period, when I was got into high school, I heard that there was a gang in my school, then I asked what are the requirements...., ya, I joined. It was so then that I can get a lot of like-minded friends that are not demanding me to be smart. (P3, lines 9-11)

In the section of the interview result, P3 stated that,

I felt that there is no place for me to be recognized in the school. They always measure someone with achievements... I hate to see it. (P3, lines 17-18)

**Theme 2: The struggle is much more appreciated.**

The participants stated that after they decided to join the gang, they followed the steps of behavior selection that were commanded by the leader and the seniors. They should gather regularly at a particular place that had been determined as the gang's base camp. They also had to follow the commands of the gang leader and seniors. P1 stated that the consequence of joining the gang is the member is obliged to gather every single day.

After I became a member, at the time, I just joined. I was told that in the gang, there are rules and a leader that must be obeyed. There were also some tasks for the members...hmmm...the task was to gather every day. Usually, after the maghrib (Islamic/Arabic prayer time, evening time) or around 19.00 until 23.00, If we rarely gather or not at all, there would be punishments from the leader; we could get beaten up harshly. But if we are obedient, follow and join the activities that had been the agenda of the gang... Surely, we would get praise and supports from the seniors and also the leader. (P1, lines 10-14)

P1 also stated that they had an urge to be appreciated for their doings:

Of course, ...happy if there are people who value our struggles, it feels like everything is not just a waste. (P1, lines 16-17)

P2, who sat in the 11th year of high school, gave a statement from a different side:

To be a member of the gang is my choice because there is no more choice for me. Everyone here, in the school, they are just pretending to be good on the face. Actually, they are not really that clever. The grouping of the "equal" still remains, even though they deny it. Ya... Equal in the economy, equal in school achievement... Ya, something like that. I believe they won't admit it, but that's what I felt, like an "uncounted." (P2, lines 17-22)

P3, as the youngest gang member, told what they felt in the early part of joining the gang:

The tampering process early in joining the gang was done in many different ways. At that time, I was ordered to get *sparing* [match fight] with my friends; I need to hurt people physically. Yaaa, I was hesitant, but what could I do, I had joined the gang... I had to dare; it's better than getting injured. (P3, lines 17-20)

P3 also stated that they were proud if they succeeded in doing their jobs/tasks from the leader.

Well, I could be said to be someone who has almost perfectly done the jobs given, then I passed the trial period. I felt proud to be able to do the jobs from the leader, I got more appreciation from the gang members. I was also appreciated by the leader. The gist is I felt so proud of myself. (P3, line 22-23)

P3 also stated that when performing klithih, sometimes they pitied the victims, but it should be taken away for the "sake" of themselves. P3 said that in performing klithih, they should be daring, the principle is, if someone doesn't want to hurt, they should be willing to get hurt.



Hence, even though there was a pity, they need to be reckless, "It's already been done" (P3, line 27). In the other section, P3 also stated that "the hazing processes, I take that as self-proving, it shows who is greater... I can show that I am great...yes...in the gang, together with the other members."

### ***Theme 3: Member solidarity.***

The participants admitted that solidarity in the gang is rather high, particularly to the leader of the gang. P1 stated: "We have a resolve to be united so that we will be recognized by the other gangs. Everyone protects each other. There was a time someone got caught by the raid of police because of bringing a sharp weapon, and then he got arrested. We were not standing still; we tried to release our friend. The leader tried to free him, by negotiating with the police, even in the end, the one who needs to pay the bail was the parent" (P1, lines 36-39).

P2 also stated a similar thing to P1:

Our solidarity is very high. If there is a problem with the other party outside the gang, we will unite to confront the people who disturb us, that is how we managed to build solidarity at that time. (P2, lines 41-42)

### ***Theme 4: Easily provoked when gathering together.***

The participants stated that when they are with their gang, it is so easy to commit violence without any consideration. P2 told that one day, they got involved in a case of destroying a resident's house just because of a simple motive. At that time, they were celebrating a friend's birthday by having a party. When P2 was gathering with their friends, there was someone passing by riding a bike then started to *mbleyer* [Mbleyer is an act of stepping on the gas of a vehicle, in this case, a motorcycle, as strong as possible so that it produces a loud sound]. With no hesitation, P2 and their friend started to run after that person, until finally, the person got into someone's house.

Then P2 and the others pelted the house where the "fugitive" was hiding. When the researchers asked, why P2 joined in pelting someone's house, P2 stated that it was solidarity, and they felt that their pride was disturbed. P2 did not consider what would be the consequence; what they thought was they should chase the "disrespectful" person. Here are the following statements of P2 showing that he still has not held any responsibility:

At that time, I didn't Ma'am... [Did not consider what consequence they would be responsible with] what I thought was I must chase the rascal. When we are together like that, it is easy to get emotional, don't care about anything else. When it's over, especially when it comes to the police and involving the parents, there is also a sense of regret. Actually, my friends and I know that brawls are breaking the laws, but what else we can do? (P2, lines 60-63)

### ***Theme 5: Feeling of dilemma.***

P1 told their concern about getting older. It had almost been 3 years of being a member of a youth gang, and they felt tired and wanted to get out. They started to think about the future, wanted to study at school because as long as P1 is a gang member, it can be said that there is almost no time to study. The desire to get out came out, mainly because P1 felt sympathy for their parents, who had to bear the shame of their actions. Parents' financial burdens also

increased when they got into problems because the one who is responsible for the bails are the parents.

P2 stated that as a child and a student, there comes a time of being too tired to still be active in the gang, so the desire to get out and back to the “right way” will eventually come out. However, it is not easy because youth gangs have strict rules that cannot be violated easily. Here is one of the statements of P2 about it:

Early in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I wanted to get out of the gang, but then I was discouraged after I heard the past stories, that if someone was to leave, they would be beaten harshly. (P2, lines 69-71)

P3 also stated a similar thing, that they sometimes want to be more serious at school, get out of the gang, and become a normal student. However, P3 faced difficulty.

What can I do, even though sometimes get tired and want to get out, I can do nothing. I once got arrested by the police, but then I was released on the guarantee that I will no more get involved in brawls. I am afraid of the police. I don't want to be in jail anymore. I was thinking of getting out of the gang, and I tried avoiding the gang. But I was continuously approached by the others to be active again. Moreover, I had been arrested in jail, and it was a “great thing” for the other members. Then all right, after being persuaded and forced, I joined the gang just like before. ...Honestly, I was quite happy to be at a higher level around the other members, much more recognized. I am happy to be respected and acknowledged by the members. It's a pride... (P3, lines 50-59)

### Composite Textural Description and Composite Structural Description

In this section, we provided a table comprised of the Composite Textural Description (CTD) and the Composite Structural Description (CSD). From the themes constructed, we arranged the CTD to explain what happened and what the participants did. The CTD is interpreted in a CSD to get an image of the process of the phenomenon that occurred (see Figure 7).

Theme	Composite Textural Description-CTD (What happened)	Composite Structural description-CSD (How it happened)
I want to be recognized.	The beginning process of the participants to join a gang is various. There is a case someone was approached by their friends. There also someone who found the gang by themselves and voluntarily joined the gang.	Based on the data obtained from this research, we can identify why the participants involved in a youth gang because they are fundamentally the same as the other Yogyakarta adolescents and students who desire recognition from the people around them, for their potential as little as it is. However, they did not receive it because of their conditions that could not fulfill the standards of society. They did not have social intelligence nor academic intelligence as the basic standard of Javanese society. The participants

		viewed that the gang provides what they desire and a place for them.
The result of struggling is much more appreciated	In the process of gang membership or “enrolment,” there are rituals for member candidates. The member candidates are tested for their audacity and earnestness in joining the gang by doing peculiar tasks, such as candidates to beat each other or to commit some violent actions toward strangers. When the members accomplish their “mission,” they would rejoice and feel happy because now they are regarded by their leaders and other members or even people from another gang.	When the participants joined the gang, they felt that they were recognized. They were appreciated for their deeds. They stayed in the gang because there were appreciations for their “achievements” from their leader and friends in the gang. The appreciation was not available for the participants in the common environment since they cannot and do not want to fulfill the standard of Javanese society that demands adolescents to be a good boy and smart.
Members solidarity	The forms of solidarity between gang members are such as to follow the gang’s decision. They should support each other and obey the leader. If a member were hurt by another gang or community, the other members should defend them by all their means.	Member solidarity is purposely formed and internalized in the gang organization. Solidarity is one form of social rules in the gang and should be abided by all gang members because, for them, solidarity is a social model to achieve the gang’s organizational goals.
Easily provoked when gathering together	Deviances committed by members of a gang, often spontaneously happen when they felt disturbed, or they felt that their gang’s pride is scratched.	The participants stated that when they are with their gang, it is so easy to commit violence without any consideration. They influence each other emotionally, especially when gathering together. That matter made them not care about the social values that should have been upheld.
Feeling of dilemma.	All participants are originated from Yogyakarta. Since young, they were being taught with religious values and the revered Javanese social values. Therefore, when they commit brutalities, at the same time, they also felt a moral dilemma. However, there was no choice for them but to commit it and endure their gang membership.	The knowledge about moral values being taught at school and home could not prevent their deviance because they saw that it was the only choice to obtain what they desire: the desire to be recognized by others.

*Figure 7 textural and structural description*

### **Composite Textural-Structural Description**

The Composite Textural-Structural Description (CTSD) has provided help to the researchers in finding the essence of the participants’ experiences about their involvement in a youth gang. We combined The Textural and Structural descriptions with considering the

Javanese social culture as the live background of the participants. Completely identifying what happened and why it happened, we concluded that the essence of Javanese adolescents' experiences about their involvement in a youth gang are as follows: (a) Youth gang members tend to have low confidence in the academic aspect and/or social aspect, and (b) There is a degradation of values in adolescents.

### Discussion

Based on the presented themes and the textual and structural descriptions in the findings, we have shown that the involvement of Javanese adolescents in a youth gang is not sudden. The revered Javanese culture and the moral values-centered lifestyle of society do not seem to be enough to build positive values in some Javanese adolescents.

#### Youth Gang Members Tend to Have Low Confidence in the Academic Aspect and/or Social Standards

The results of the research show that the main problem of the participants and the impetus for their involvement in a youth gang is their desire to be "accepted" by others. However, these youth did not meet the standards set in society to feel accepted. When their need to be acknowledged and recognized in the social environment was not reached, there was a feeling of solitude in their heart. Solitude is a terrible situation due to the lack of social connection with someone in society (Gierveld et al., 2006). The participants felt that society disregarded and ignored them as persons, students, and adolescents. From the view of social psychology, the participants' perceptions were different from the general views of people in the Javanese society. Javanese society tends to view that every person should assimilate themselves into the values and standards of society, not vice versa (Mulder, 1992).

The emergence of a desire to be recognized in teenagers is normal, as a part of the development of self-identity (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Pattaro, 2015). Teenagers need recognition from other people, especially their parents (Bi et al., 2018), teachers (David, 2015), and their friends or schoolmates (Korkiamäki, 2016) and when these people do not provide the recognition that teenagers want and need, they try to find the other people that they believe can provide what they desire, namely the youth gangs (Esbensen et al., 2009). It can be seen that students who became a member of a youth gang, joined the gang because they were experiencing a phase of confusion of self-identity (Upreti, 2017).

The educational goals of Javanese parents, which later became the standard of success for a Javanese teenager were indicated by being good and smart (Hasanah et al., 2019), but the participants determined they were not able to meet these standards. The inability of the adolescents to live up to these standards can be the lead to frustrations. Thus, they involved themselves in a youth gang to escape from the frustrations and to be socially accepted. In this context, it could be said that teachers, parents, and the environment/society, as the *tripusat* [3 central] of education (Dewantara, 1977), have failed to function to connect the social and individual values in these adolescents who then turned to join a youth gang.

#### There is a Degradation of Values in Adolescents

When the participants had joined the youth gang, they thought the members and the leader of the gang fulfilled their desire to be appreciated, especially when they succeeded in their jobs/tasks. There was an implicit image of satisfaction in the words and body language of the participants when they uttered their experiences. The statements of the participants emphasized that humans naturally will desire to get appreciation from others. It is an essence

of the social-life of humans (Byerly, 2015; Heatwood, 2011), which has to be fulfilled. In this case, the participants felt to not have received the desired appreciation from the people closest to them.

The feelings of pride and happiness of gang members when being praised and appreciated by the leaders and the gang indicated that the participants are just like other adolescents. They care about the perception of others (Pfeifer et al., 2009). On the other hand, the feelings of pride and happiness when successfully carrying out their gang missions by engaging in social violations is an indication that there is an error in the way adolescents understand the values of self-existence (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). If viewed from the context of Javanese culture, the phenomenon is prone to happen when the family does not function as the values education center for their children (Dewantara, 1977).

Every participant in this research knew that they broke the Javanese social norms (Raharjo, 2013) when they were active in the deviant acts of groups/gangs or klithih. Sometimes they felt guilty when committing violence against the people without any clear motive. However, their knowledge and feelings were covered up by the disappointment they felt towards the environment that did not provide any positive space for them or for their development that was below the standards of society.

Social deviation tends to occur most frequently by members of a gang, especially when they are gathering in a group or gang and in response to any behavior or conduct that “disrespects” their gang. The deviant behaviors that were committed by the participants were initiated by solidarity (White, 2009) and enraged by emotion.

Parents at home and teachers at school need to pay more attention to this matter. Parents and teachers need to care more about the children and appreciate their natural potential and should be able to build communication to internalize social values as guide, not a demand. The task of educators in such cases is to awaken the ability of adolescents to identify themselves through positive values. It could be realized if there is support (Bacigalupe & Camara, 2014) from the environment that emphasizes positive values, individual potential appreciation, and space according to their potentials. The supports from the parents and teachers are the internalization of moral values, religious values, and socio-cultural values in society. The supports need to be continuously and consistently offered with lots of empathy and love.

## Limitations

This research was conducted in the context of Eastern culture. Therefore, the research can only provide a picture of a phenomenon in a similar context. This research has not yet revealed other factors that might be a significant impetus for the participants to join a youth gang. This research is also unable to construct measures to help adolescents, members of a youth gang, to be able to not get involved in youth gang activities. Thus, we cannot conclude with the solutions that would reduce and cut the cycle of the thriving youth gang phenomenon besides suggesting preventive measures for teachers and parents. Further research is necessary to find the other preventive measures and solutions to reduce and break the thrive of youth gang phenomenon, especially in Javanese society.

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